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Exploring the Personality of Luxury Fashion Brands

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Introduction

Despite the economic downturn in many parts of the world, the luxury fashion industry is steadily growing. However, at the same time, the competition is getting more intense. Many brands which were traditionally mainly serving the western developed markets are entering the developing countries. Therefore, a challenge facing the luxury fashion brands today is to maintain current loyal customers while expanding to welcome those new customers in the developing countries. As a key concept in relational marketing, brand personality was found having very important impact on consumer behavior toward brands, including brand commitment/loyalty, brand trust, and brand attachment (Louis & Lombart, 2010). However, limited research has been conducted to explore the personalities for luxury fashion brands.

Brand personality has been a popular topic in the marketing literature over the past 50 years. Aaker (1997) was the first one who provided a definition for brand personality as “the set of human characteristics associated with a brand”. Based on a set of brands across product categories, Aaker (1997) introduced the most widely used and well-developed brand personality scale, which reveals five distinct and robust personality dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. While acknowledging the importance of Aaker’s work, researchers question the generalizability of Aaker’s framework, arguing that personality perceptions may vary with product category and brand personality dimensions must be specific to the particular product categories (Arora & Stoner, 2009). In another words, dimensions other than what are included in the Aaker’ scale may also be salient for a specific product category, such as luxury fashion products. Therefore, this study was designed to explore the personality dimensions specific to luxury fashion brands.

Research Design and Methodology

Guided by Aaker's brand personality study (1997), the selection of luxury fashion brand personality attributes followed a three-step process. In the first step, we conducted a free-association task to ensure the relevance of the attributes. Eighty two undergraduates at a large university generated a list of 197 attributes. The second step involved incorporating the 42 original personality traits proposed by Aaker (1997) into our inventory. Finally, from the set of 239 personality attributes, three groups of attributes were eliminated because they were redundant, ambiguous, or irrelevant to the construct. This resulted in a final set of 67 traits used to examine luxury fashion brands’ personality. Though college students were not traditionally the target market for luxury products, young consumers, including college students, are gaining more attention from the luxury brands due to their strong spending power and their recent spending on luxury items (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Though these young aspirational

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consumers may not be able to afford all the luxury they want, they are familiar with the brands and have developed a taste for the luxury. Therefore, for this study, we recruited 421 students enrolled at three large universities in the U.S., and 417 responses were found usable.

Data Analysis and Results

An exploratory factor analysis was carried out on the 67 traits of brand personality with a varimax rotation. Items loaded on more than one factor at .40 or greater were assigned to the factor with the highest loading, and items that were not related to any factor were excluded from the next steps of analysis. Single-item factors were also not included in the next steps of analysis. As a result, a total of seven factors were extracted. All the seven factors had eigenvalues larger than 1. And together, the seven factors accounted for approximately 33% of the total variance. The figure below represents the seven personality traits extracted for the luxury fashion brands.



The results from this study only serve as an exploration of the personality traits relevant to luxury fashion brands. Further analyses, including Confirmatory Factory Analysis, scale reliability analysis, and others, will be conducted to examine the reliability and validity for each of the trait dimensions. Future studies could also be conducted to validate the trait dimensions through testing their relationship with other brand constructs, such as brand image, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand attachment.

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